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QUESTION OF THE VIOLATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS IN THE OCCUPIED ARAB TERRITORIES, INCLUDING PALESTINE

Written statement submitted by North-South XXI, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement, which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1296 (XLIV).

[11 March 1998]

The Situation in Palestine

1. On 1 February 1998, Madeleine Albright, United States Secretary of State, assured the head of the Israeli Government of the United States unfailing support for Israel. This self-interested solidarity is under the control of Zionist organizations that campaign in the United States and Europe (consider, for example, Likoud France and the political cast of the December 1997 thirty-third World Zionist Congress) for fundamentalist groups that are growing more and more influential in Israel and whose disregard for international law is complete.

2. The united States, which holds itself up as the "arbiter" and "initiator of the peace process" as regards the question of Palestine, is in fact both judge and party. It supports a State built, on absence of separation between State and religion, on Israel's "divine right" to own all of Palestine and on denunciation of opponents in the name of anti-Semitism. The Zionist threat is, however, a threat not just for Palestine and the Middle East, but for the Jews themselves: with religious constraints becoming more and more burdensome, many Israeli intellectuals feel that there is now a "war of civilizations" between laity and clerics within Israeli society. The blind Western solidarity with a religious State is unnatural: in the twentieth century, identity of the State and religion means fanaticism and intolerance.

3. The Israeli State, which for 30 years has been breaching all the resolutions of the United Nations General Assembly and Security Council, has never, whatever the degree of its "moral and political condemnation" by the international community, suffered the slightest real penalty. For strategic reasons - and out of domestic political considerations, Western States display towards Israel the utmost leniency and forbearance. Even a number of Western NGOs remain silent more often than not about human rights violations in Palestine. No organization - and notably not the International Atomic Energy Agency, which in some cases (that of North Korea, for example) applies very strict controls - has inquired into the existence of weapons of mass destruction, particularly nuclear weapons (long delivered by a variety of Western firms), in Israel.

4. Israel, a regime under United States and Western protection, is accorded every indulgence, despite its multiple violations of international law (continuing occupation of the Syrian Golan and southern Lebanon, shelling of United Nations troops at Qana, etc.) and of human rights (violence against Palestinian demonstrators, administrative detention without trial, use of torture, etc.).

5. The agreements between Israel and the Palestinian Authority, though "sponsored" by the United States itself, are "overlooked" for the benefit of the Netanyahu Government. Israel continues, with total impunity, to establish settlements in the Occupied Territories and East Jerusalem. The Palestinians, under the paralysing impact of Israel's repeated and lengthy economic blockades, are deprived of all means of exercising their right to development: their living conditions are now worse than before the Oslo accords. Palestinian prisoners of conscience are still under detention. The "Arab State of Palestine" proclaimed in 1988 and recognized by some 100 States still

does not really exist. The Palestinian people is condemned, as it has been for over half a century, to awaiting, in submission to a foreign power, an occupier's pleasure.

6. Together with the United Nations, regional organizations have come out in support of the Palestinian people. In March 1997, the Arab League decided to suspend the process of normalization of relations with Israel. The European Union has repeatedly denounced the illegal settlements in the Occupied Territories and reaffirmed that Jerusalem is subject to United Nations Security Council resolution 242 and that Israel does not have sovereignty over the territories occupied by force (see, inter alia, statement PESC/97/18 of 3 May 1997). Nevertheless, the United States/Israeli alliance continues to paralyse all the measures and decisions adopted in support of the Palestinian people.

7. The situation of the Palestinian people is urgent. The Commission on Human Rights cannot ignore the economic decline, impoverishment and cultural repression affecting the entire region. The rise of confessionalism and the fundamentalist excesses in the Occupied Territories are the logical outcome of 50 years of domination by a sectarian State. Denunciation of Israel's perpetual impunity is imperative. The application of double standards apparent in policy towards Iraq, Libya and Cuba on the one hand and Israel on the other discredits all the institutions and States that engage in it. The rights of the Palestinian people can only be guaranteed through the application of international law, Israel's withdrawal from the territories occupied in 1967 and the reaffirmation of the Palestinians' inalienable right to the construction of their sovereign State.